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AUTHOR Lloyd, Bruce A.
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ABSTRACT

In a special developmental reading program designed to improve the reading skills of personnel employed by the Michigan Employment Security Commission, 40 vocational-development specialists were given six weeks of intensive reading instruction. Half of the class time was devoted to use of the PARADIGM lessons, which include activities for the development of increased perceptual speed and span of recognition, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, and to use of the Educational Developmental Laboratories Controlled Reader Program, which involves reading filmstrips and completing work in an accompanying workbook. The other half of the class time was used for small-group activities and individual conferences. Analysis of pretest and posttest scores indicated that significant gains were made in reading speed but not in vocabulary or comprehension. Subjective evaluation of the program was overwhelmingly favorable, and out-of-class behavior substantiated the subjective findings. (GW)

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A READING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM FOR MATURE ADULTS

Bruce A. Lloyd
Western Michigan University

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Few individuals read to the maximum of their potential and the causes of this deplorable situation are legion.[1] Several major inhibitors to reading are inefficiency, emotions, and experiences. Some people read so slowly that the task is a laborious chore. Others have developed such negative feelings about reading that they find it grossly distasteful. Moreover, previous reading experiences both in and out of a formal school setting usually dictate the present attitudinal mode of the reader and if these have been less than positive or satisfying, reading is avoided whenever possible. Yet reading is the key to learning[2] and in order for one to become better informed, he must read widely as well as in depth. To accomplish this end is no easy task, especially for mature adults who have built up avoidance behavior patterns over the years. Therefore, overcoming negative reading attitudes as well as strengthening and improving reading skills should be

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[1] Robert Karlin, Teaching Elementary Reading Principles and Strategies, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc. 1971, pp. 1-3.

[2] John J. DeBoer and Martha Dallman, The Teaching of Reading (3rd Edition), New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970, pp. 3-4.

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major goals of every reading program; so they were in the reading program to be described.

The reading program was actually a part of a larger special institute sponsored by the Michigan Employment Security Commission (MESC) and the Department of Labor. The MESC Institute was funded in an effort to strengthen the education of some forty vocational development specialists over a two-year time span. Intensive six-week instructional periods were offered Institute members on campus at Western Michigan University; the purpose of the training program was to upgrade and to develop new skills of personnel now employed by the MESC so they can function successfully in the Human Resources Development Concept.[3] The special developmental reading program was designed to meet these objectives: to increase reading speed, comprehension, and vocabulary knowledge as a basis for continuing education and training.[4]

To this end, the reading program was designed to offer successful reading experiences and effective reading activities for all. Therefore, a variety of instructional procedures were conducted for the total group as well as for small groups and individuals.

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[3]Robert L. Betz, Interium Report on the Institute for Vocational Development Training, Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, May 24, 1971, p. 3.

[4]Ibid., p. 5.

Overview. The Institute participatns were divided into two groups of twenty (Group A and Group B) and were given intensive developmental reading instruction for alternating six-week periods. All members took the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Revised Edition) which measures vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and reading rate. Form A was administered as a pretest and Form B was given as the posttest to objectively determine participant progress. Open-ended questions for a subjective evaluation of the reading program were also given to discover other factors not covered in the Nelson-Denny Reading Test.

Instructional classes were held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 7:00 to 9:00 o'clock. The first hour was devoted to the instensive reading of pre-planned programmed material. After a short break, students worked in small groups or by themselves and individual conferences were scheduled.

Detail. The directed, developmental reading activities of the first hour consisted of two mutually reinforcing programs, the PARADIGM lessons[5] and the EDL Controlled Reader program. Both were used as a basis for structure and continuity of instruction as well as for purposes of demonstrating that Institute participants

[5]Bruce A. Lloyd and Rosalia C. Lloyd, "PARADIGMS and Reading Flexibility," Education, 92: 57-65, September-October, 1971.

could succeed in reading better.

Each PARADIGM lesson consisted of four pages. The first of these was an exercise in tracking digits. The second page was an exercise in tracking nonsense letter patterns. Both activities were designed to aid in the development of increased perceptual speed and span of recognition. The third page was an exercise in vocabulary matching. Students looked at a key word at the left and tracked to the right to locate the synonym. The fourth page was an exercise in reading comprehension. All pages were timed.

It took about twenty minutes for this activity. Students were able to check their responses, which provided the immediate reinforcement so crucial to developing successful reading and positive attitudes.

Each EDL (Educational Developmental Laboratories) lesson consisted of reading one filmstrip and completing work in an accompanying workbook. The Controlled Reader lesson procedures were adjusted to meet the objectives of the present reading program and the unique requirements of the participants. Sequence changes were made in order to stress real reading comprehension rather than to merely test memory.

Each filmstrip lesson was introduced by posing an open-ended question relating to the over-all idea in the lesson. The preview procedures suggested in the activity

book were followed and extended to encompass student opinions about the conclusions which one could draw from the preview. If a student could defend his answer it was usually (not always) accepted. The flexibility here helped students learn flexibility in their interpretation of what was read.

The vocabulary pertinent to the reading selection was noted and discussed orally. This procedure replaced the suggested activity book format of programmed vocabularies and could adjust easily to the nuances required in the story to be read. The time saved here was better utilized in a second reading of the story.

When the introduction and preview were completed, students read the filmstrip at an appropriate speed (initially 200+ wpm). Then they worked out the comprehension check activities, but did not score their responses. Instead, they read the same film a second time, but at a higher speed (initially 300+ wpm). Here they had an opportunity to look for items missed the first time, so they were rereading for specific purposes. This was one of the major reading skills being taught in the program.

In almost every case, the second reading was of great value to students because they realized how important it was to have specific goals for which to read. This helped them concentrate. Moreover, they soon

learned that they could read material much faster the second time through. They could speed up their reading because they were familiar with much of the content.

After the second reading, students scored their responses and were given time to pose questions.[6] If an error was made and a student disagreed with or did not understand the answer, he was urged to ask questions. Everyone found this helpful because many were making similar errors, and it was comforting to know that each was not alone in his misunderstanding. The realization that it is normal to make an occasional mistake and that no one is perfect helped improve the self-image.

Reading the filmstrips as noted took about thirty minutes, and when this was completed, the first period ended. Students then took a short break.

The reading activities for the second hour were primarily of a small group or individual in nature. During this time many students read their texts and related reading assignments. Others worked quietly together. The teachers were as busy as ever (1) meeting privately with individual students and discussing ways for them to improve their reading skills and (2) meeting with small groups to work on specific skill deficiencies that could be handled best on such a basis. This format

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[6]Bruce A. Lloyd, "Teaching as a Science," Education, 90: 63-64, September-October, 1969.

can be likened to and compared with the operation of the self-contained classroom approach to individual instruction where an attempt is made to teach students what they need to know when they need to know it.

Objective Evaluation. A two-tailed t probe was used to determine the significance of the differences between reading performance on the pretest and posttest. The factors involved were vocabulary, $p = .20$; comprehension, $p = .89$; total test, $p = .48$; and rate, $p = .006$. The only statistically significant change was in the factor of reading rate. Although there were changes in the other factors, none was significant at the .05 level or better.

Subjective Evaluation. An opinionnaire of four open-ended questions was administered after the Nelson-Denny Test. Below are the questions and collated responses. No student was required to sign his name to this.

1. What parts of the program do you believe were most effective in helping you become a better reader?

Here the responses were overwhelmingly in favor of the special PARADIGM lessons and the EDL Controlled Reader lessons.

2. Are there any parts of the program that were ineffective?

Here there was a very small negative reaction to the warm-up period and the individual practice.

3. If you were going to participate in this program again what changes would you like to see made?

The vast majority of students indicated that no changes were needed. Many students wrote that they wanted more, that is, the entire program should be intensified. More work on speed, more work on vocabulary, more work on comprehension, more individual work, and more conferences were requested.

4. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the program?

Sixteen students rated this excellent (great, outstanding, beautiful, etc.) and two rated it good.

Several students wrote comments which seem significant enough to include here:

> "The course was a real help - and fun, too. Enjoyable mostly because of the enthusiasm of all of you - and your interest in differences of opinion."
>
> "Thanks for a great experience."
>
> "This improved reading enabled me to cover a great deal more of the reading required for our courses and as a result I performed better academically."

Conclusions. Objective measurements indicate that the only statistically significant gain made by Institute participants was in the skill of reading rate. Increases in vocabulary knowledge and general comprehension skills were not significant. The progress in reading rate does indicate the seminal effect of the

program and substantiates previous findings.[7-8]

Subjective evaluation of the program was unquestionably favorable and even enthusiastic. The students firmly believed that the program helped them read better and they wanted more. Out-of-classroom behavior substantiated the subjective findings. An aura of satisfaction, contentment, and eagerness to become better readers permeated their other learning activities in different instructional areas.

Discussion. It was evident that the students were eager to improve their reading skills, but were apprehensive about the program initially. Teacher enthusiasm and the program itself soon overcame any reservations that students may have had. A structured yet flexible reading program was vital to the over-all success of the effort because it provided instruction in the necessary reading skills at a time when the specific skills were needed.

The program as noted was a qualified success. Significant gains were made in reading speed but not in vocabulary or comprehension. Undoubtedly this was due to the relatively small amount of time devoted to

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[7]Bruce A. Lloyd, "Objective and Subjective Evaluations of an Upward Bound Summer Reading Program," The Journal of the Reading Specialist, 7: 147-152, May, 1968.

[8]_____, Diane Griewank, Henri Carter, "Reading and Upward Bound - Another Look," Reading Horizons, 10: 147-153, Summer, 1970.

reading in the improvement class. Two sessions per week for six weeks is not long enough to make significant gains in such vital areas as vocabulary and comprehension skills. Moreover, there were only ten sessions because the first and last were used for testing. However, a good beginning was made and the students had many positive feelings about their progress. In the final analysis this was the most significant gain of all.

A Final Note. The author wishes to express his sincere appreciation to Douglas Skuggen and Robert Campbell for their superb teaching and devotion to the program.

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